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SUBJECT: SEOUL - PRESS BULLETIN; October 23, 2009

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DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

ROK Defense Minister Kim Tae-young and U.S. Defense Secretary Robert
Gates adopted a 16-point joint statement following the 41st Security
Consultative Meeting (SCM) in Seoul yesterday. The statement
confirmed a continuing U.S. commitment to defend the ROK against
North Korea's military threats. (All)

Secretary Gates made no direct request for aid to Afghanistan, only
saying in a joint press conference: "We obviously welcome any
contribution that any countries around the world are prepared to
make, but that decision - what and how much to contribute - is
entirely up to the ROK." (All)

According to a key ROKG official, a high-profile, nongovernmental

ROK figure met in Singapore last week with Kim Yang-gon, Director of the United Front Department at North Korea's Workers' Party, apparently to discuss a possible summit between the two Koreas.
(All)

The ROKG is considering resuming imports of sand from North Korea, which have been suspended since April, when the North test-fired a long-range rocket. (Chosun, Hankyoreh, Segye) This move is likely to create a stir, given that there has been suspicion that payments for sand shipments may have been pocketed by military authorities in the North. (Chosun)

MEDIA ANALYSIS

- ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM)

All media covered yesterday's annual ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting, in which the U.S. pledged to mobilize globally available U.S. forces and military capabilities to augment the ROK's defense in case of crisis. According to media reports, the U.S. also made it clear that it will provide "extended deterrence," using the full range of military capabilities, including the nuclear umbrella, conventional strike and missile defense capabilities, in order to deal with North Korea's military threats.

Most media observed that this development carries great significance

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since it has expanded U.S. reinforcements from American territory and Japan-centered forces to U.S. forces across the world in the event of an emergency on the Korea Peninsula.

On the Afghanistan front, all media reported that Defense Secretary Robert Gates made no direct request for aid to Afghanistan, quoting him as only saying in a joint press conference: "We obviously welcome any contribution that any countries around the world are prepared to make, but that decision - what and how much to contribute - is entirely up to the ROK."

Conservative Chosun Ilbo editorialized: "The greatest threat to peace on the Korean Peninsula is North Korea's nuclear program. There is a high possibility that the North Korean nuclear issue may be settled in the following two ways: accepting a nuclear-armed North Korea or making a fundamental change to the current armistice on the Korean Peninsula in return for the North's abandonment of nuclear weapons. Should the North's nuclear possession become an established fact, we wonder if the U.S.'s stated 'extended deterrence' alone could satisfy the ROK's political, military, economic and psychological security (needs)."

Conservative Dong-a Ilbo argued in an editorial: "The defense agreement with the U.S. is based on a solid bilateral alliance. If the alliance weakens, the agreement cannot ensure a feeling of safety. This is why we are worried about disbanding the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) and transferring wartime operational control in 2012. Few multinational forces have won in war without a unifying command. Joint operation under the leadership of the U.S. military helped prevent North Korea from taking the ROK."

Moderate Hankook Ilbo observed: "The ROKG is reportedly considering sending a 300-strong force to Afghanistan to protect the civilian Provincial Reconstruction Team there. ... In order to protect the civilian team, however, combat troops, who are stronger than the units of military medics or engineers, are needed. Police officers are not appropriate. Talking about sending mercenaries will also only invite uncontrollable controversy. Rather than vaguely citing the ROK-U.S. alliance as a reason for troop deployment, the ROKG should first come up with alternatives which can win public approval."

- N. Korea

Citing a key ROKG official, all ROK media reported that there was a s-e-c-r-e-t contact in Singapore last week between a high-profile,

nongovernmental ROK figure and Kim Yang-gon, Director of the United Front Department at North Korea's Workers' Party, apparently to discuss a possible summit between the two Koreas.

Conservative Chosun Ilbo, in particular, quoted a key ruling camp official as saying: "North Korea has long requested a meeting with a person who can speak on behalf of President Lee Myung-bak, and it is true that such a meeting was recently on the verge of happening. Since news of the meeting was made public, however, it will be difficult to hold meetings of senior officials from both Koreas for some time."

OPINIONS/EDITORIALS

JITTERS OVER DEFENSE ACCORD WITH U.S.
(Dong-a Ilbo, October 23, 2009, page 39)

The United States yesterday reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to extended deterrence by using the full range of its military capabilities, including a nuclear umbrella, if North Korea attempts a nuclear attack on the ROK. In times of emergency, Washington will flexibly increase and relocate its forces across the world to the Korean Peninsula. U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Korean counterpart Kim Tae-young adopted a 16-point joint communique on North Korea's nuclear program at the Security Consultative Meeting yesterday, which was based on talks of the two countries joint

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chiefs of staff Wednesday. The joint statement can pressure North Korea to abandon nuclear weapons.

Secretary Gates reaffirmed Washington's extended deterrence to Seoul, saying a nuclear attack on the ROK will be considered one on U.S. soil. He clarified specific means like intercontinental ballistic and submarine-launched ballistic missiles and strategic bombers. Gen. Walter Sharp, the commander of U.S. forces in Korea, said June 26 in a lecture at the Korea Military Academy that the extended deterrence includes missile defense. The concept of extended deterrence was specified in the "Future Vision of the Korea-U.S. Alliance" at the June bilateral summit after being included first in the Security Consultative Meeting's joint communique in 2006. The joint agreement is also meaningful since it includes the expansion of U.S. forces to include U.S. forces across the world as well as forces from American territory and Japan-centered forces in case of emergency on the Korea Peninsula.

The decision, however, failed to dispel insecurity since the plans to disband the Combined Forces Command and transfer wartime operational control back to Seoul in 2012 remain unchanged. The two defense ministers will check progress on a regular basis, leaving a silver lining of hope. Gates promised that Washington will keep providing complementary forces until Seoul can defend itself on its own. Fortunately, the U.S. will maintain its 28,000-strong forces in Korea and extend their stay here to three years.

The defense agreement with the U.S. is based on a solid bilateral alliance. If the alliance weakens, the agreement cannot ensure a feeling of safety. This is why we are worried about disbanding the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) and transferring wartime operational control in 2012. Few multinational forces have won in war without a unifying command. Joint operation under the leadership of the U.S. military helped prevent North Korea from taking the ROK.

As Secretary Gates indirectly requested, cooperation in war zones such as Afghanistan could be a good opportunity to strengthen alliances. The ROK needs to create a good environment for U.S. forces in Korea, such as assisting in the relocation of the main U.S. base to Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi Province. Now is the time to show great interest in the comprehensive strategic alliance with national and global security in mind, something that was agreed on at the bilateral summit in June.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is

identical to the Korean version.)

AFGHANISTAN SUPPORT REQUIRES CAREFUL CONSIDERATION
(Hankyoreh Shinmun, October 23, 2009, page 31)

Defense Minister Kim Tae-young and U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates convened yesterday in Seoul for the 41st Republic of Korea-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) and issued a joint communiqué, the core of which dealt with the U.S.'s dedication to providing a firm security umbrella for the Korean Peninsula, and the ROK's contribution to global security. Broadly speaking, in return for the U.S. assistance in decreasing the ROK's security concerns resulting from North Korea's strengthened nuclear and missile forces, the ROK decided to agree to expand its contribution in Afghanistan if the situation arises where the U.S. finds itself in a difficult position.

The statement shows that the two countries are in agreement on promoting close cooperation in handling wide-ranging global security challenges, including peacekeeping, stabilization, reconstruction support, humanitarian aid and disaster relief. Nowhere was the word "Afghanistan" used. During his press conference, Gates said the U.S. has not made any concrete requests to the ROKG for support in Afghanistan, and that the timeline and extent of ROK support is entirely up to the ROKG. This was merely his statement; however, it is a widely known s-e-c-r-e-t that the U.S. is strongly hoping for ROK cooperation in a number of areas, including troop deployment. A

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speech Gates gave to the men and women of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command provided evidence of this sentiment, when he said that military contributions to global security are also in the ROK's core interest.

The ball is now our government's court. Since our government has already promised to construct a new hospital at Bagram Air Base, and to increase personnel for Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and provide economic support, it is a matter of great interest as to whether our government will expand aid to include military support. Military support including combat troops, however, is something we can never accept, in consideration of the facts that the Afghanistan War, as a war which began out of U.S. revenge for the 9.11 terrorist attacks, lacks appropriate justification, that the U.S. is also currently undecided about whether to boost its troop presence, and that the ROKG has already pulled out medical and engineering units amidst public shock following the mass-kidnapping of a missionary service group in the summer of 2007.

It is worth actively considering whether contributing non-military support is in accordance with our international prestige and economic power. In particular, there is a need to focus support on the reconstruction and rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan, a country which has been impoverished due to war. However, because the current political situation in Afghanistan is so murky and the U.S. has also been unable to present a blueprint for resolving the situation in Afghanistan, a careful posture is critical. A quick response would not be a competent response.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

ARE SEOUL AND WASHINGTON BEING COMPLETELY FRANK?
(Chosun Ilbo, October 23, 2009, page 39)

The ROK and U.S. defense chiefs held their annual Security Consultative Meeting on Thursday in Seoul and stipulated in a joint statement specific steps to provide the ROK with "extended deterrence" against the North Korean nuclear threat. It was the first time specific measures were put on paper. The U.S. will provide the ROK with a nuclear umbrella, conventional strike and missile capabilities. In addition, Gates said the U.S. will deploy any American troops that can be mobilized from around the world in the event of a crisis on the Korean peninsula.

According to a bilateral defense treaty, the mobilization of additional American troops was to come from soldiers based in the U.S. mainland and Japan. But Washington has now pledged to expand that to American troops stationed around the world. At a time when concerns are increasing over a potential shortage of U.S. troops after the transfer of full control of Korean troops to Seoul, the agreement demonstrates Washington's resolve to uphold its pledge to defend the ROK. The joint communiqu avoids any mention of the ROK's support for military operations in Afghanistan, leaving it up to Seoul to decide.

None of the 16 clauses of the joint statement leave any room to doubt Washington's commitment to the ROK's defense. But even with the signing of such a powerful agreement, a feeling of unease lingers.

The greatest threat to peace on the Korean Peninsula is North Korea's nuclear program. There is a high possibility that the North Korean nuclear issue may be settled in the following two ways: accepting a nuclear-armed North Korea or making a fundamental change to the current armistice on the Korean Peninsula in return for the North's abandonment of nuclear weapons. Should the North's nuclear possession become an established fact, we wonder if the U.S.'s stated 'extended deterrence' alone could satisfy the ROK's political, military, economic and psychological security (needs). If the armistice is turned into a proper peace treaty, the ROK will face the greatest upheaval in national security in its history because it would probably mean an end to the U.S. Forces Korea.

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It is in these circumstances that the allies once again stipulated that the transfer of full troop control will take place as planned on April 17, 2012. Gates even referred to this as a "historic change." If the North Korean nuclear threat did not exist, this would be fine. The two countries said they would time their military preparations to the period of the handover. But as the situation stands, a strategic decision is needed requiring political, diplomatic, economic and psychological factors to be considered, in addition to military and technical ones.

If North Korea makes the strategic decision to scrap its nuclear program, it will inevitably demand the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula. It knows that this is the ROK's greatest weakness. And at that point, Washington will have to balance whether it has more to gain from North Korea giving up its nukes or from revising its alliance with the ROK.

Washington's decision is difficult to predict. The most important factor when the time comes will be whether Seoul and Washington were able to hold frank discussions about the future of their alliance 10 or 20 years down the road. This should serve as the framework not only for peace on the Korean peninsula, but for peace in Northeast Asia involving the U.S., China, Japan and Russia.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

ROKG JUSTIFICATION FOR SENDING TROOPS TO AFGHANISTAN TO GUARD CIVILIANS THERE IS Unconvincing
(Hankook Ilbo, October 23, 2009, Page39)

The ROKG is reportedly considering sending a 300-strong force to Afghanistan to protect the civilian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) there. Debate on the troop dispatch, which was heated ahead of the ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) on October 22, now appears to have ended in a conclusion (that ROKG will consider sending troops.) It appears that the ROKG intends to send troops (to Afghanistan) for whatever reason and then give the excuse that they are not for combat purposes. However, it is doubtful whether this kind of justification may sound persuasive enough to convince people to agree to the troop dispatch. The government's efforts seem to be clumsy.

We should first remember that we had started to send the Dongui Medical Unit and the Dasan Engineering Unit to the region in 2001 but, after the kidnapping incident in 2007, rushed to pull out the troops. The two units were composed of a small number of non-combat troops. However, faced with the deterioration of domestic public opinion and a call for troop withdrawal from the Taliban insurgents who held 20 Koreans hostage, the ROKG could not afford to continue to have troops stationed there.

Since then, the ROKG has maintained its stance against troop redeployment. We also repeatedly pointed out that it would be reckless to send troops other than reconstruction staff or police instructors. Just because there were changes of governments in the ROK and the U.S. does not mean that such a position must be changed. With the situation in Afghanistan deteriorating further, even in the U.S., which is leading the war, supporters of the troop pullout outnumber those opposed to the pullout.

This is why the Obama Administration is hastening to withdraw troops from Iraq and is focusing on stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. In particular, it is vital to maintain the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) led by the U.S. and NATO. A majority of the 19 nations that contributed over 300 troops to the ISAF are showing signs of breaking ranks. This might be the reason why the ROKG came up with a plan to increase its PRT staff to 300 and send 300 guard troops to the region.

In the joint communiqu  of the SCM, U.S. Defense Secretary Gates

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stressed the expansion of the ROK's contribution to peacekeeping operations. However, it is far-fetched to argue that Secretary Gates' emphasis on the role of the ROK military makes the troop dispatch inevitable. In order to protect the civilian team, however, combat troops, who are stronger than the units of military medics or engineers, are needed. Police officers are not appropriate. Talking about sending mercenaries will also only invite uncontrollable controversy. Rather than vaguely citing the ROK-U.S. alliance as a reason for troop deployment, the ROKG should first come up with alternatives that can win public approval.

IT IS TOO EARLY TO REGAIN WARTIME OPERATIONAL CONTROL FROM U.S. IN APRIL, 2012

(JoongAng Ilbo, October 23, 2009, page 46: Excerpts)

In a joint statement following the Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in Seoul yesterday, ROK and U.S. defense ministers reaffirmed that the ROK will take over wartime operational control of its military forces from the U.S. by April 17, 2012. It seems that the two ministers made this commitment, mindful that an increasing number of ROK people are raising concerns over the transfer of wartime operational control or voicing opposition to the plan, saying it is too early. Their agreement, however, is not enough to defuse controversy. Considering the ROK military's (lack of progress in) modernization, the ROK's economic situation and security conditions on the Korean Peninsula, a transfer of wartime operational control to the ROK as planned is highly likely to undermine security on the Korean Peninsula. At the National Assembly early this month, Defense Minister Kim Tae-young said that it would be best to maintain the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command but the ROK has no choice but to prepare for its disbandment because the two nations agreed to do so.

During the National Assembly audit on the Defense Ministry, lawmakers pointed out many problems regarding the ROK's defense position. In the joint statement, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates pledged to keep providing complementary forces until the ROK is capable of defending itself on its own even after the transfer of wartime operational control. The U.S. specifically said it is committed to providing extended deterrence against the North Korean nuclear threat using the nuclear umbrella, and conventional strike and missile capabilities. This assurance seems to have been made due to concerns that ROK forces will likely be weakened after the transfer of wartime operational control.

For years until the ROK and the U.S. agreed in 2006 to disband the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command, the two countries were at odds over several foreign and security issues including the North Korean nuclear issue. In particular, former President Roh Moo-hyun, who had emphasized self-defense since taking office, was too idealistic when he requested that the U.S. hand over wartime operational control. This request, however, conformed to the interest of the U.S. which embarked on restructuring its military to enhance mobility. Therefore, the ROK and the U.S. agreed to the transfer of wartime operational control, not based on the objective evaluation of ROK military's mid-and long-term capabilities but because of temporary conflicts between the two countries and the strategic change in U.S. military alignment.

Whatever prompted the agreement, the ROK is not in a position to halt the transfer process of wartime operational control right now. It is evident that we should make our greatest efforts to achieve self-defense. However, the ROK's "Defense Reform 2020," which was initiated in 2005, is suffering a setback in several areas. In addition, we are unlikely to find ways to resolve problems (regarding our defense) until April 2012. Therefore, we have no other option but to continue to strengthen the combat capabilities of our military while at the same time seeking renegotiation with the U.S. over the transfer of wartime operational control to delay the timetable (for the transfer.)

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STEPHENS